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HISTORY  
OF  
FORT CONSTITUTION

AND  
"WALBACH TOWER,"  
PORTSMOUTH HARBOR, N. H.

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BY A STUDENT OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE.

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Edited by George B. Griffin.

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PORTSMOUTH:  
C. W. BREWSTER & SON, PRINTERS.  
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TO  
THE PRESENT COMMANDED OF FORT CONSTITUTION,  
Captain Benjamin F. Wells,  
*This Little Work*  
IS INSCRIBED WITH THE BEST WISHES OF THE AUTHOR.

381882





## HISTORICAL SKETCH.

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For many years prior to the opening of the nineteenth century, an earthwork existed upon "Fort Point," named Fort William and Mary. Capt. GATES and Lieut. FURGERSON were among the last placed in command; preceding them, however, was Capt. STODDARD, represented as a man of noble mein, very popular,—of a generous, forbearing disposition.

In June, 1806, Brevet Colonel WALBACH was ordered here with a company of Heavy Artillery, to garrison the post. Soon after, the building of Fort Constitution was commenced, under the superintendence of Engineer LEBARON, and was finished in 1808.

Brevet Colonel Walbach was a German Count, and left his native country for America only a few years prior to receiving this command.

A succinct *description* of Fort Constitution might be deemed "contraband" in these times, so a general representation must suffice.

The Fort is founded upon a rocky ledge about three hundred yards from the centre of the main channel of the Piscataqua. It is of an oblong form, containing two bastions, and of rude construction. The scarp to the height of fourteen feet being composed of rough wall stone laid in mortar and finished with brick, completing an elevation of twenty feet. The counter-scarp is capped by finely cut granite so inclined that water cannot remain upon it.

The front entrance is guarded by one port-cullis and two gates; the port-cullis is constructed of timbers



arranged longitudinally and transversely,—securely bolted and elevated, ready to be dropped at a moment's warning.

The interior gate opens from the middle, being constructed of thick live oak, the bottom section of which presents a solid surface, while the upper portion is composed of pieces of timber arranged in a lattice-like form, firmly bolted. The interstices so formed would be used as loop-holes for muskets in case of a land attack.

The quarters for officers and barracks for soldiers, mess room, guard house, etc., etc., were all originally within the Fort. At a distance from the garrison, the white-washed walls, and the red-colored brick with the granite belting, form a beautiful contrast, and the guard house surmounting the gateway with the buildings peering from the interior, tend to give it an antiquated appearance.

The abutments at each side of the gateway project a short distance from the face of the wall, and rise to an elevation of twelve feet. The keystone of a truncated form bears this inscription:—

FORT CONSTITUTION.  
1808.

\* \* \* \* \*

Brevet Colonel Walbach remained in command of the Fort until 1821,—except during a short interval in the war of 1812, when he was ordered to Plattsburg on the river Saranac, near its junction with Lake Champlain, to assist the American army in their attack upon the British forces there stationed. His company, however, remained at this post, commanded until his return by a subaltern officer.

He was promoted to a Colonelcy in 1821, and placed in command of Fort Independence, Boston Harbor. Having become attached to many of the citizens, he left New Castle with considerable reluctance. He was a professed Christian, distinguished for benevolence and charity, ever ready to help the needy. Adopting the passage "It is





more blessed to give than to receive," he let no opportunity pass without doing good; and many are they who can testify of gifts received from him. He was noted for his uniform courtesy and gentlemanly conduct, and was highly esteemed by all. He afterwards rose to the rank of Brevet *Brigadier General*, and for many years presided over Court Martials in Baltimore. He was at last compelled to resign on account of ill health and old age, and it is said the members associated with him shed tears on account of his resignation. He died in that city in 1859.

\* \* \* \* \*

An explosion occurred at the Fort on the 4th of July, 1809, which threw a deep gloom over the community. A salute of several guns was given at noon to celebrate the day, and many of the citizens of NEW CASTLE, with friends from the neighboring towns, were gathered there to enjoy the national holiday with music, dancing, and the like; and all "seemed merry as a marriage bell." At three, the hour of dinner, a gun was fired by Sergeant ALLEN, in honor of WALBACH, the commanding officer, and his guests. Being customary in those days to *dry powder in the open air*, a large quantity was placed in open boxes a few feet apart upon the *terre-plein*.

In firing the gun, much carelessness was manifested by Allen in handling the port-fire, and a spark from it dropped on the powder. The explosion being heard at a great distance, people soon gathered from all directions to learn its cause.

The number of casualties is known to exceed *twelve*; the precise number, however, is as yet unknown. Were it not that many were attracted by sports taking place in some other part of the Fort, the number would have been greatly increased. One of the ladies standing upon the parapet was never afterwards seen, supposed to have been *blown to atoms*. A leg from JAMES TREFETHEN was taken



off and thrown through a window, upon the table of WALBACH, the glass cutting his lady while adjusting the table cloth. The day was Tuesday. Its site was near the north-east bastion, and the Colonel with his guests were dining in the north-west room of the building destroyed by fire Sabbath evening, Nov. 4th, 1831. Belonging to the Fort at that time was a band composed of pieces of music of every description. Then, as now, the parades were well attended, and when the company led by WALBACH, accompanied by the band, marched upon the Island and halted upon the "Shannon Ground" to have their dress parades, a general good time was expected by all.

On a Sunday in 1814, a report became current in New Castle that the British were landing in York Harbor, Me., which, however, subsequently proved to be untrue. The town became greatly excited, and many of the citizens who were at church left the meeting and repaired to the Fort. Col. Walbach selected the site of the Tower bearing his name, upon the eminence adjacent to the garrison, and preparations were then immediately made in consequence of the alarming rumor, for excavating to prepare the foundation.

Capt. Marshall's Company was ordered here from the Fort on JAFFREY'S Point, at the entrance of Little Harbor, to assist many of the citizens who volunteered their services in its erection, several of whom are yet living on the Island. At that time this Tower was considered very strongly built, and with the co-operation of the Fort was thought to be a sufficient defence to the harbor.

It has an elevation of about twenty feet. The entrance is through a small door on the north, requiring a stooping posture when entering, and the way to the top is circuitous. The embrasures are three, and casemated. A large 32-pounder pivot was placed upon the parapet, and a small 4-pounder at each port hole. These guns and the balls fitting them were sold in 1850, with the guns of the





Fort, used in the war of 1812, to Alger of Boston. For several years prior to the building of the Magazines at the Fort, this Tower was used as a store house for powder, and kept in excellent order.

It now presents a ruinous appearance. The bricks having become loosened, many of them have fallen and now lie scattered at its base. As the razing of this structure is at present under consideration, it is advisable that all who wish to examine it should soon do so, as a visit to the Tower is well worth the time spent in its examination. —

“ Look on its broken arch, its ruined wall,  
It's chambers desolate, and portals foul :  
Can all saint, sage, or sophist ever writ,  
Re-people this lone tower, this tenement refit :  
This was a stern round tower of other days,  
Firm as a fortress, with its fence of stone. ”

From 1821 until 1827, the post was in charge of Captain FABIVS WHITING. Like his predecessor, Whiting was possessor of many of the qualities pertaining to the perfect gentleman ; amiable, kind and forbearing. He was ordered with the Company in 1827 to Fort Johnson, North Carolina. He was afterwards compelled to resign on account of ill health, and died a few years since highly esteemed by all.

Brevet Major ANSART of the Third Regiment of U. S. Artillery, was next placed in command, and remained until he was ordered to Florida, May 31st, 1836,—a noble officer, of correct deportment, sterling integrity, high military bearing, and a sincere friend to the soldier ; he was beloved by all.

The command of the Post afterwards fell to Dr. SARGENT, who remained until 1838. He was a man of liberal education, of a pleasant, obliging disposition.

From 1838 to 1845, it was in charge of Captain and Brevet Major DIMMICK, with Company E, of the First U. S. Artillery. Deservedly esteemed by all ; a sincere



Christian, constant in his attendance at church, ever ready to take part in the exercises of the meeting, his example is worthy of being followed. Liberally assisting in the support of the gospel; manifesting a deep interest in the welfare of the community, he was ever ready to lay down to his friends and to the soldiers, — "line upon line and precept upon precept;" encouraging those striving to do right, and admonishing those doing wrong. He, also, was liberal in his gifts to the poor; visiting them, he would learn their wants and seek to make them comfortable. He was ordered with the Company to the Rio Grande in 1845, and gradually rose in rank until he became a Colonel in the Regular Army. He has since commanded Fort Warren, Boston Harbor, and at present is in charge of the Army Asylum at Washington, D. C.

From 1845 until 1848 the post was vacant under the charge of Ordnance Sergeant WHEELER. His death occurred from the rupture of a blood vessel, occasioned while in the discharge of his duty, hailing a schooner bound into the harbor.

For a few months he was succeeded by Sergeant EDWARD TOWNSEND, — then Capt. FIELD came with Company K. Third Artillery, U. S. Army; and in the spring of 1849, Major WADE assumed command. He was mild in government; of a jocose turn of mind, and soon won the hearts of the soldiers. He died February 17th, 1850; his remains were conveyed to Portsmouth with military honors, and placed in a tomb.

He was succeeded by Capt. JUDD, who remained but a short time, being transferred for Brevet Major AUSTINE, who took charge of the Company, while Col. WASHINGTON commanded in the post.

In October, 1859, Col. WASHINGTON was granted leave of absence to visit his home in Virginia, and the post fell to the command of Brevet Major AUSTINE, who was emi-





nently successful in discipline. He is now Provost-Marshal General of Vermont.

On the 6th day of October, 1853, they were ordered away, and in December embarked on board the steamer San Francisco, for California. She soon encountered a severe storm which destroyed her engine, and made her a complete wreck. On Christmas day several were washed overboard, among whom were Captain FIELD and Col. WASHINGTON. She drifted at last into the Gulf of Mexico, and the passengers were taken off by three different vessels. Col. WASHINGTON and Capt. FIELD were drowned.

From the period last mentioned until March 20th, 1863, the post was commanded by Ordnance Sergeant JAMES DAVIDSON, of the U. S. Regular Army. His history is of some interest, as he has served his country for more than *forty* successive years, being the last Regular Army officer stationed at this garrison.

He joined the army at the early age of seventeen years, and was on duty with a company of Light Artillery in Fort Independence. In 1825, he attended the Artillery school of practice at Fortress Monroe, where he remained until 1826, when he was ordered to Fort Moultrie, the noted rebel stronghold near Charleston, S. C.; — while there he received a warrant appointing him First Sergeant of Co. D, 3d Regiment of U. S. Artillery, commanded by Brevet Major F. ANSART, before alluded to.

He came to Fort Constitution in 1827, and in 1829 married a daughter of the late Capt. Christopher Amazeen of this town.

In the summer of 1835, some unhappy disturbances occurred with the Florida Indians, who by their inhuman outrages rendered the territory of Florida a field of bloodshed. The Company of Ansart having received orders embarked for that State, where they assisted greatly in the subjugation of the Seminole tribes, and their subsequent



removal west of the great Father of Waters. He there saw much service.

For a while they were stationed and he received the appointment of Sergeant of Ordnance at Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Fla. On the 1st of September, 1838, orders were issued for them to repair to Castle William, New York Harbor, where they remained only one month, when they were ordered to report to Plattsburg, on account of Border conflicts, occasioned by the sympathy of many of the citizens with the Canadian patriots in a rebellion.

Vexatious disputes soon after occurring in regard to the settlement of the Maine boundary, the Company were hastened to Houlton, Me., and remained one year, during which time he was acting as Sergeant Major of the post. He again received an appointment constituting him Sergeant of Ordnance, and was ordered to Fort Preble, Me. This occurred on the ninth of November, 1839. He remained on duty at that post until Dec. 1846, when he resigned for field service in the Mexican war.

He was at the taking of Vera Cruz and other important Mexican strongholds. He returned with the Company in 1848, and was stationed at Fort Strumbull, New London, Conn., where he remained until he was transferred to Fort Constitution, on the 30th of July, 1852.

The post was vacant under his charge until the year 1861. At the outbreak of the Southern Rebellion in April, 1861, he was commissioned by Ichabod Goodwin, then Governor of New Hampshire, a Captain in the Second Regiment N. H. V., and detached to garrison this Fort.

He still held the appointment of Ordnance Sergeant of the Regular Army, in consequence of which his duties were considerably increased. At that time as fast as men were organized into companies and drilled, they were sent to the front, hence many different companies were placed under him for longer or shorter periods.

Besides commanding the various organizations sent him,





he enlisted two companies for the State, which were subsequently sent South.

At one period many of the citizens volunteered from New Castle and served under him for some months; then refusing to be "mustered in" for general service, they were soon "mustered out." The last company under him was attached to the Ninth Regiment N. H. V., then preparing for the seat of war, and he very unwillingly was left behind.

On the 2d day of August, 1862, he had remaining only one officer and six men, who were discharged from the service on the 23d day of October following.

While holding his commission as Captain in the volunteer army, the noted *Dr. Batchelder* of Epping, was his prisoner for the term of "forty days and forty nights." Batchelder was well pleased with the Captain, who extended to him every courtesy.

March 20th, 1863, two Companies of the Second Regiment N. H. V., under Capt. SALES, having taken charge of the post, he fell back to his original position as Ordnance Sergeant.

By entering the army at so early an age, he became inured to all the hardships pertaining to the soldier's life; and by remaining in the service for so long a period, he has acquired an experience such as men seldom gain.

During the eighteen months that he held a commission, more than eight hundred men were placed at various times under his command. He was a strict disciplinarian and treated his soldiers as gentlemen. Unlike some volunteer Captains, he neglected nothing tending to be of benefit to his men. The commissary department he placed under his own supervision, and never was any cause of complaint suffered to remain after being preferred.

Such was the respect shown him that no soldier was placed under arrest during his command, and three Companies, commanded respectively by Captains BIGLY, GILLIS,



and DUNBAR, presented him as a token of their regard, an elegant sword and belt, with a magnificent silver trumpet and spy-glass. He now resides in a beautiful residence built upon the site of an ancient mansion in New Castle, commanding a fine view of the spacious river and the lofty Agamenticus, with the table lands in the distance.

Though his sword is at present inactive and has never been drawn except in an honorable cause, yet should the opportunity occur, as his long service for our country's honor deserves, he will buckle it on once more to keep step to the music of Union and Liberty.

Capt. Sales with his Company were soon ordered away, and Hon. N. S. Berry, then Governor, feeling the need of placing a strong garrison at the Fort, visited the Secretary of War, at Washington, and suggested to him the idea of raising a Company of Artillery expressly for this post.

An organization composed of many of the first citizens of the State was enlisted and placed under command of Capt. CHARLES H. LONG, formerly Lieut. Col. of the Seventeenth Regiment N. H. V., which was shortly consolidated with the Second N. H. Regiment,—ere fairly filled. He first entered the service in the autumn of 1861, as Captain of Company G, Fifth N. H. Regiment; and was severely wounded at the battle of Antietam, Md.

On the 22d of July, 1863, the First Company Heavy Artillery N. H. V. was mustered into the service of the United States, *their enlistment papers specifying* that they should *remain at this Fort during the term of their service*; and a card was issued by Governor Gilmore, who had just entered into office, in several of the leading State papers, assuring them that they should stay here, as the Secretary of War had agreed to such an arrangement.

Therefore under such inducements men were enlisted and mustered in, but on the 6th of May, 1864, pursuant to an order from the Department of the East, commanded by Major General Dix, the Company started for the front.





This caused a general surprise throughout the State and many were indignant at the action of the Government,—but like true patriots they departed for Washington, where they arrived in due time.

On the 23d of September, 1863, a detachment from the Second Company Heavy Artillery N. H. V., was sent from Fort McClary, for lack of accommodation, to Fort Constitution, where they remained for several months.

This Company also left for the front with Capt. Long's, under command of Capt. Ira McL. Barton, who has since been promoted to Lieut. Col. of the First Regiment N. H. Heavy Artillery. They are now commanded by Capt. Geo. P. Thyng, who was a 2d Lieut. in this Co. when organized. He was formerly a Sergeant in the First Company Heavy Artillery N. H. V., and rapidly rose to the position he now occupies. Capt. Thyng is much esteemed by his men and bears an irreproachable character. His Company is now stationed within the defenses of Washington.

\* \* \* \* \*

Succeeding the Company of Capt. Long's was the Strafford Guards of Dover, and the National Guards of Manchester, commanded respectively by Captains J. B. LITTLEFIELD and JAMES O. CHANDLER. Littlefield was formerly a Captain of a Company in the Third N. H. Regiment, and was compelled to resign his command in that organization on account of a diseased eye. He was senior Captain, and therefore commanded the post. The Strafford Guards were ordered home in July.

Capt. Chandler's Company was enlisted for the term of ninety days, at the expiration of which many of them re-enlisted under him into the Third Company Heavy Artillery N. H. V., and are now attached to the First Regiment, within the defences of Washington.

Capt. Chandler is an officer of much energy, and bids fair to win an enviable name on the mighty roll of the "Union's brave defenders."



Following these Companies was the Martin Guards of Manchester, under command of Capt. GEO. C. HOUGHTON, of that city ;—a young man of gentlemanly bearing, sociable, of a pleasant disposition.

On the second day of August, the Lafayette Guards, under command of Capt. JOEL H. TARBELL, arrived at this Fort, to which they had been ordered by the Governor. This Company was composed of a fine class of men, and the citizens of New Castle respected them much. Belonging to the organization was a Band, under the guidance of a celebrated instructor, CARL KREBS. Their strains of music imparted much animation to the Island, and the monotony of garrison life was greatly lessened in consequence of their presence. They returned home a few weeks before the expiration of their term of service, to Lyndeboro'. Capt. Tarbell was an amiable man, of correct habits, and was highly esteemed by his command.

Meanwhile the command of the post was given to Capt. Houghton. Many of his Company re-enlisted at the expiration of their term of service, and they received additions from some of the most respectable families of the State, making it one of the best Companies New Hampshire has yet furnished.

On Monday the 26th of December, 1864, they were ordered to report to Gen. Auger's Division, at Washington, and they departed ; no doubt they will add lustre to the already renowned troops of the old Granite State.

" New Hampshire's sons have nobly won  
A Nation's heartiest thanks and praise ;  
On many a field has valor's crown  
Their standards decked, and fadless bays.  
Her icy hills have furnished stock  
To sweep dark treason from the land !  
As soon o'erturned the granite rock,—  
By deadly charge and bayonet shock,  
*The ranks by old New Hampshire manned !*"





The First Company remained in the defences of Washington and vicinity until November 27th, when, by a special order from President Lincoln, approved by the Secretary of War, they were again removed to their original headquarters at Fort Constitution. A feeling that injustice had been dealt them induced three of their number, with the sanction of the Company, to visit the President, in order to represent to him the true state of affairs regarding the term of their enlistment.

Aided by the influence of *N. G. Ordway, Esq.*, the worthy and highly respected Sergeant-at-Arms at the U. S. Capitol, they succeeded in receiving an order from the Chief Executive which effected their return to Fort Constitution, where they are now stationed.

Their commander, Capt. Long, was promoted to the Colonelcy of the First Regiment N. H. Heavy Artillery in November last, and his headquarters are now at Fort Reno, in Gen. Hardin's Brigade, Washington, D. C.

Capt. BENJ. F. WELLS is his successor, having been a Lieutenant in Company H, Eighth Regiment N. H. V. when it was organized, and afterwards promoted to the Captaincy in the field. He was wounded during a severe battle near New Orleans, October 27th, 1862, in the left groin. His life was providentially saved by the ball's hitting and imbedding itself nearly in the centre of a *powder flask* in his pocket. The identical cannister ball and flask are still in his possession. Being incapacitated for active duty he accepted a First Lieutenancy in the First Company Heavy Artillery N. H. V. He is a man of sterling integrity, high moral culture, faithful and energetic; he is much esteemed by his command, and is emphatically the "right man in the right place."

At the breaking out of the Southern Rebellion it was deemed of great importance to place this harbor in a better condition for defence. For many years the building of a new Fort was contemplated, and on one occasion its



boundary was staked out to include a large tract of land. But in 1862 surveys were made, and it was decided to commence a new Fort, to be built with all the modern improvements. Gen. BENHAM was superintendent ; and the first blow towards its erection was struck by William Mathes, a resident of New Castle, on the 16th of November, 1862. With his hammer and points he assisted in marking its limits, and labored there for many months. Gen. Benham being ordered to report for active service, he was succeeded by Capt. PAINE, who in a short time gave place to the present incumbent, Col. J. N. MACOMB, who by his scholarship and efficiency, causes the work to progress with considerable rapidity.

THE END.

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